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No Indictment Seen Now for Tongsun Park

By Ron Sarro
and Walter Taylor

Washington Star Staff Writers

A top official of the Justice Department said today that the year-long investigation into Korean influence-buying on Capitol Hill has so far failed to develop sufficient evidence to indict former Washington society figure Tongsun Park for any role he may have had in the scandal.

In an unusual briefing for junior members of Congress impatient with the pace of the investigation, Benjamin R. Civiletti, chief of the department's criminal division, also said the Korean investigation is about 80 percent complete and indicated indictments are expected soon.

Civiletti said the department is concentrating its investigation on alleged wrongdoing by current and former members of Congress, and later would address other figures and such questions as whether there had been an official cover-up of Korean activities starting in 1972.

ATTY. GEN. Griffin B. Bell accompanied Civiletti to the morning briefing, apparently arranged through the White House by House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., after junior congressmen sharply criticized the slowness of the department's probe and the House Ethics committee's own investigation.

Bell said "nothing has a higher priority at the Justice Department" than the Korean investigation because allegations of Capitol Hill corruption have "placed a cloud over the Congress." Bell said President Carter "knows there is a cloud over Congress and it needs to be removed."

A number of junior congressmen were unhappy with the general nature of the briefing, a ban on questions and the department decision to open it to the press. "This was a big P.R. media event," said Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo. "I feel gypped. I feel like a co-conspirator in a cover-up."

REP. LEON Panetta, D-Calif., chairman of the freshman congressmen, acknowledged many were "disappointed" by the briefing. Panetta said that as a lawyer he understands the prosecutors gave "as complete a briefing as they could," but that as a politician the lack of specific information was for him "frustrating."

Civiletti made clear that Park remains an essential element in the department's investigation, but said there is not enough evidence to extradite him to Washington. Short of extradition, investigators were "forcefully and vigorously" pursuing other avenues "to obtain the truth" from him, Civiletti said.

Park is alleged to have been an agent of the Korean government who sought through campaign contributions, gifts and other favors to influence congressmen to support continued military assistance to Korea.

Under the pretense that he was going on a two-week business trip, Park left Washington permanently last year after some preliminary questioning about his activities. He is believed to be in London and would be subject to the U.S. extradition treaty with Great Britain.

Civiletti said Park was questioned last year before a large amount of evidence and documents in the case had been collected when the department stepped up the investigation early this year. "He was here, but he's not here now," Civiletti said in one of his more specific pronouncements.

CIVILETTI REFUSED to give any indication of how many indictments may be coming in the next three months, declining to say "whether 3, 5, 7, 25 or any number" are involved. There have been reports that five initial indictments of current or former congressmen are anticipated.

The investigation was handled in a "very preliminary" way after it first got started at the department last July, Civiletti said. By March, after he took over the division, there were five full-time U.S. attorneys, 12 Internal Revenue Service Agents, and 12 FBI agents assigned, and another attorney will join the team this week, Civiletti said.

Investigators have "interviewed and reinterviewed" 500 people from "all walks of life," have brought 60 witnesses before a grand jury considering the case and now sitting twice a week, and have "collated and reviewed tens of thousands of documents," Civiletti said. He said the department has made "enormous progress" since March.

Park's public statements denying

illegal payments and wrongdoing are "useless," Civiletti emphasized. He said investigators are seeking the means "to obtain the truth from the witness," but that extradition so far has not been possible.

MEANWHILE, THE leadership of the Senate Ethics Committee quietly summoned CIA Director Stansfield Turner to discuss highly sensitive intelligence documents that could implicate members of the Senate in the Korean influence-buying scandal.

Following reports that material culled by the CIA from intelligence sources in Korea — possibly from electronic surveillance of the presidential palace of Park Chung Hee — might suggest improprieties by some senators or former senators, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr., an ethics committee member, requested the meeting with Turner, now scheduled for tomorrow.

The Democratic and Republican leaders of the Senate, Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia and Howard H. Baker of Tennessee, reviewed the CIA information two weeks ago and were so startled by it that they called Bell to the Capitol for assurances that the Justice Department had had access to the material in its on-going criminal investigation of the Korean affair.

THE JUSTICE Department, in fact, had been aware of the information for more than a year.

Byrd and Baker also contacted the leaders of the ethics committee, Sens. Adlai E. Stevenson, D-Ill., and Harrison H. Schmitt, R-N.M., to determine whether their newly reconstituted panel had screened the intelligence reports. Stevenson and Schmitt also had reviewed the material by that time.

Of the six ethics committee members, however, only the two committee leaders — both of whom have stated flatly that no "proof" of Senate involvement has been brought to their attention — have up to now had access to the CIA materials.

Earlier this year, Stevenson and Schmitt made blanket requests to a variety of executive and legislative agencies for any information that might involve senators in alleged attempts by Korean agents to bribe members of Congress. Although they have kept the rest of the committee abreast of their activities, Stevenson and Schmitt reportedly have kept the specific fruits of their inquiry to themselves, not involving even the small committee staff in the probe.

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